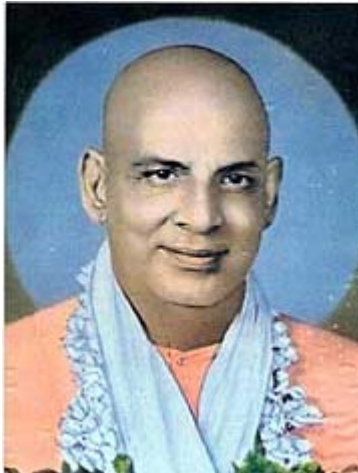


THE QUINTESSENCE OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

By

SRI SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

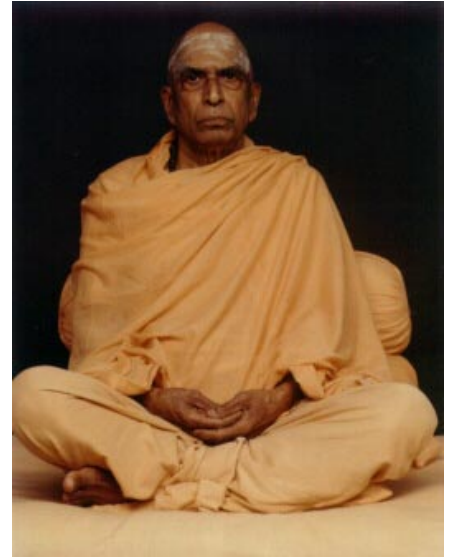


**Sri Swami Sivananda
Founder of
The Divine Life Society**



**SERVE, LOVE, GIVE,
PURIFY, MEDITATE,
REALIZE**

**So Says
Sri Swami Sivananda**



Sri Swami Brahmananda

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THE QUINTESSENCE OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

(The Sadhana Panchaka—Five Verses on Spiritual Practice—of Sri Sankaracharya)

Sri Sankaracharya, the greatest exponent of the Advaita Philosophy, has in five short verses given the essence of spiritual practice for the benefit of those seekers who are treading the path. There is a story prevalent among a section of the people about the composition of this poem by the Acharya. It is said that some of his close disciples were sitting around him just before his Mahasamadhi. One of them addressed him: “O Bhagavan, you have given to the world voluminous commentaries on the Bhagavadgita, the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras, as also several Prakarana Granthas and Stotras about almost all deities. In the days to come, when men become weak in their understanding and capacity to grasp the real import of the scriptures, aspirants of mediocre intellect treading the spiritual path would find it extremely difficult and almost impossible to read and digest all these works. Kindly therefore condescend to give to the world for the help of such spiritual seekers, in a nutshell, what they should do to attain the *summum bonum* of life.” In reply, the great Acharya is said to have given these five short verses, known as Sadhana Panchaka, which contain the quintessence of spiritual practice.

This beginning verse contains instructions regarding what the aspirant should do while leading his normal life remaining in his own house. This stage is preparatory to entering the spiritual path—a stage when the aspirant attunes his whole personality—body, organs of sense and action, mind and intellect—with the Spirit within.

I

वेदो नित्यमधीयतां तदुदितं कर्मस्वनुष्ठीयतां
तेनेशस्य विधीयतामपचितिः काम्ये मतिस्त्यज्यताम् ।
पापौघः परिधूयतां भवसुखे दोषोऽनुसन्धीयता-
मात्मेच्छा व्यवसीयतां निजगृहात्तूर्णं विनिर्गम्यताम् ॥

vedo nityamadhīyatām taduditaṃ karmasvanuṣṭhīyatām
teneśasya vidhīyatāmapacitiḥ kāmye matistyaajyatām |
pāpaughāḥ paridhūyatām bhavasukhe doṣo.anusandhīyatā-
mātmecchā vyavasīyatām nijagrḥāttūrṇaṃ vinirgamyatām ||

a) “*Vedo-nityam-adhiyatam*—Let the scriptures be studied daily.”

The scriptures referred to here are Moksha Shastras, i.e., the scriptures dealing with the subject of Moksha (Liberation) like the Upanishads, the Gita, the Brahma Sutras, the commentaries thereon, the Prakarana Granthas on the subject,—treatises dealing exclusively on Liberation,—literature on Yoga and Bhakti, etc. The aspirant should make a selection according to his temperament. Mere reading of the texts without diving deep into their meanings and import which always lie hidden in them, may not yield full benefit. Not that reading alone is completely

useless, it has its own benefits; but reading combined with reflection on the meaning, will hasten the progress to a very great extent. The study should be a regular, daily routine item of the Sadhana. There should not be any interruption. To have a fixed time every day is very beneficial. This item of Sadhana is called Svadhyaya which also means study of one's own Atman—the Self.

b) “*Taduditam karmasvanushthiyatam*—Let those Karmas enjoined in the scriptures be well performed.”

Scriptures classify Karmas into Nitya and Naimittika, Kamyas and Pratishiddha—obligatory Karmas performed daily and on special occasions, those performed for fulfilment of desires and prohibited sinful ones. Leaving out completely the last category of prohibited Karmas, the spiritual aspirant is enjoined to perform the other two kinds of Karmas. Karmas also may include the daily activities one does for the continuance of his life's journey. Whatever one does, whether ritualistic or secular, should be dedicated to God. The performance of Karmas is to be converted into Karma Yoga which purifies the mind and prepares the ground for the descent of the Divine Light.

c) “*Tenesasya vidhiyatam apachitih*—Through the practice of Karma let God be worshipped.”

Dedication of all actions together with their fruits to God is the best form of His Puja or worship. The ritualistic Puja with flowers, fruits, etc., is not excluded. Even that is to be done in the spirit of Karma Yoga, with the only desire for the final fruit of God-realisation.

d) “*Kamye matistyajyatam*—Let the mind be taken away from desire-engendered actions.”

The next step is to detach the mind from those actions performed for fulfilment of mundane desires. On no account should the spiritual aspirant start a Karma with desire to get something worldly. Even sacrifices leading to heavenly worlds are not to be performed with the desire for those worlds. Results of Karmas including heavenly worlds are only transient and are incapable of yielding eternal peace. Desire for everything except the attainment of the Supreme Atman, should be eliminated from the mind. Only a desire-free mind will reflect the Atman. Therefore, the aspirant is directed to avoid all desire-engendered actions and to restrict himself to the performance of the obligatory Karmas alone which are generally considered as not productive of any merit and the non-performance of which would result in sin. But the Acharya is of the view that the obligatory Karmas also are productive of results, for they bring about the purification of the mind and prevent sin resulting from their non-performance, and that therefore they should also be performed without attachment either to them or their results.

e) “*Papaughah paridhuyatam*—Let all sins be destroyed.”

The aspirant is instructed to destroy all sins. This is done either by expiatory rites prescribed in the scriptures or by actual experience of the fruits of the sinful actions. The sins already committed which fructify in the present life can be nullified by these two methods. Further accumulation of sins should be prevented by doing actions without attachment to their fruits and by dedicating them to God.

f) “*Bhavasukhe dosho'nusandhiyatam*—Let the aspirant enquire into the defects and imperfections of the pleasures of this transmigratory life.”

The Acharya exhorts the aspirant after liberation in the beginning stages of his practice, to make a thorough investigation into the ephemeral and deceptive nature of the sense-pleasures. This investigation, if made following the method prescribed in the scriptures, will convince him of their false, tantalising nature. Pleasure, supposed to be obtained from objects, is only a titillation of the nerves. All sense-pleasures are immediately followed by pain alone. When one is convinced of this fact, one's mind will no longer be attracted by sense-pleasures either of this world or the heavenly worlds and as a result he will be able to pursue his spiritual practice without much hindrance.

g) “*Atmeccha vyavasiyatam*—Let a firm resolve be made to attain the Atman.”

A burning aspiration to realise the Atman in this very life is an unavoidable desideratum for a spiritual seeker. Spiritual life should not be resorted to as a change from the boredom of the stereotyped routine worldly life. It is not like going to a hill-station to spend the summer vacation. A complete turning away from the sense-world is a prerequisite for the dawn of this yearning for Liberation which is called *Mumukshutva*.

h) “*Nijagrihat-turnam vinirgamyatam*—Let him leave his own house immediately.”

A sincere student of the university finds hostel life more conducive than a life in his own home for his studies, because in the former he is able to spend more time for studies in a favourable atmosphere with the colleagues and professors. In his own home the student is beset with so many distractions which act as obstacles in the execution of his college studies. Even so, to the neophyte treading the spiritual path, living away from his own house, will greatly help him to avoid distractions. For a spiritual seeker, obstacles in the form of temptations in the house are a thousand times greater than those of a student. Hence, renunciation of one's own home and one's kith and kin is insisted on for a seeker during this period of his Sadhana.

II

सङ्गः सत्सु विधीयतां भगवतो भक्तिर्दृढा धीयतां
 शान्त्यादिः परिचीयतां दृढतरं कर्माशु सन्त्यज्यताम् ।
 सद्विद्वानुपसर्प्यतां प्रतिदिनं तत्पादुका सेव्यतां
 ब्रह्मैकाक्षरमर्थ्यतां श्रुतिशिरोवाक्यं समाकर्ण्यताम् ॥

saṅgaḥ satsu vidhiyatām bhagavato bhaktirdṛḍhā dhīyatām
 śāntyādiḥ paricīyatām dṛḍhataram karmāśu santyajyatām |
 sadvidvānupasarpyatām pratidinaṃ tatpādukā sevyatām
 brahmaikākṣaramarthyatām śrutiśirovākyaṃ samākarnyatām ॥

This verse contains instructions about what the seeker should do after leaving the house till he gets himself initiated by his own Guru.

a) “*Sangah satsu vidhiyatam*—Let him resort to Satsanga—company of the wise.”

One of the most helpful Sadhanas for a spiritual aspirant is contact with the wise—the Srotriya Brahmanishthas—those who are well-versed in the scriptures and always fixed in Brahmic consciousness. Sat means Existence-Absolute, which is also Consciousness-Absolute and Bliss-Absolute. Satsanga, therefore, would mean keeping the mind always in one’s own Atman. It also means the company of the learned saints and sages, because their company would always be conducive to keep the mind away from worldly thoughts and absorbed in thoughts about God.

b) “*Bhagavato bhaktir-dridha dhiyatam*—Let him have unswerving and firm devotion to God.”

This is a natural consequence that follows Satsanga. Company of great saints will kindle the fire of devotion to God as the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent Being, the instrumental and material cause of creation, preservation and destruction of the universe. The aspirant should have Sraddha—complete unflinching faith in God—so that his ego may get thinned out. To everything including success in his spiritual practice, he now depends on God and God alone. The Acharya in his Vivekachudamani defines Bhakti (devotion) as seeking after one’s real nature (Sva-svarupa-anusandhanam) and Sri Sandilya in his Bhakti Sutras defines this word as extreme attachment to Isvara, the Lord. On a little reflection one understands that there is not much difference between the two definitions.

c) “*Santyadih parichiyatam dridhataram*—Let the qualities like, Santi, Danti, etc., be practised firmly.”

The aspirant is exhorted to possess the *Shatsampat* which includes Sama, Dama, Uparati, Titiksha, Sraddha and Samadhana—tranquillity of mind, self-restraint or control of the senses, cessation from all worldly activities, fortitude or power of endurance, faith in God, Guru, the scriptures and the Atman, and concentration or one-pointedness of mind on the Atman.

d) “*Karmasu santyajyatam*—Let him renounce all Karmas immediately.”

The aspirant who has been following the above-said instructions for a pretty long time without interruption, is now instructed to renounce all Karmas. A full-time aspirant who has already left his own home and has been engaging in the study of scriptures, doing the obligatory Karmas, worshipping God with devotion, attending Satsangas, practising the Shat-Sampat with earnest aspiration for Liberation and who is well-advanced in these practices, is now instructed to renounce all Karmas so that he may become qualified to take the next great step forward in his march which marks a definite turning point in his life. The question of renunciation of all Karmas is a very intricate one about which there is difference of opinion among the several schools of philosophy. Lord Krishna in His immortal Song, the Bhagavad-Gita, has clarified the position. The eighteenth chapter opens with Arjuna’s question about the truth of Sannyasa and Tyaga (renunciation of all Karmas and abandonment of fruits of Karmas) and the Lord’s reply thereto is

contained in the next eleven verses. These verses admit of different interpretations and hence the Acharya in his commentary on them has given his view best suited to Spiritual Sadhakas especially those following the path of Knowledge (Jnana Marga). The spiritual aspirants, according to the Acharya, should perform their allotted Karmas without desire for their fruits. What is to be renounced by them is attachment to Karma as well as its result. Inaction on the part of the aspirant is discouraged completely.

e) “*Sadvidvan-upasarpyatam*—Let him approach a wise sage.”

The next step in the aspirant’s march should be to approach a proper preceptor. Till now, he has been practising the Sadhana enumerated above with the help of the scriptures and the company of the wise in general, and as a result, he is now possessed of the Sadhana Chatushtaya—the four unavoidable qualifications of a spiritual aspirant, viz., discrimination between the Real and the unreal, dispassion or absence of desire for the pleasures of this world as well as heavenly worlds, the six items referred to in No. II-c above, and an earnest aspiration for Liberation from the cycle of metempsychoses. He has now become qualified to approach his Guru. The Acharya indirectly hints that one who goes to a Guru for initiation before acquiring all the above said qualifications will have to face only disappointment.

f) “*Pratidinam tatpaduka sevyatam*—Let him adore his sandals (feet) daily.”

Having approached the Guru what should the aspirant do? This is laid down in the half line of this second verse. Let the aspirant serve the Guru daily till he (the Guru) is pleased with him. The service of one’s own Guru is the most important Sadhana which prepares the disciple to receive initiation. It is a colossal misunderstanding that prevails among some that the service of one’s Guru is insisted on for the benefit of the Guru. We worship God for our good and for our prosperity and spiritual evolution. God is not in any way profited by our worship. Nor does He lose anything by our not worshipping Him. Similar is the case with the Guru, whose worship and adoration help the aspirant to liquidate his Samskaras lying buried in the depths of his mind in the subconscious and unconscious levels. The scriptures are full of lives of Spiritual Sadhakas, like Satyakama-Jabala, Indra, etc., referred to in the Chhandogya Upanishad, who were tested very severely by their Gurus before giving initiation. The severity of the tests will depend upon the past sins of the disciple, which have to be liquidated. The disciple who comes out successful in these tests alone is fully qualified to get himself initiated into the mysteries of the Supreme Being.

g) “*Brahmaikaksharam arthyatam*—Let him enquire about the one indestructible Brahman.”

When the Guru is pleased with the service of the disciple, the latter should with great humility enquire about the means of liberation from the bondage of this mundane life. He should pray to the Guru for being instructed about the Atman-Brahman. The relationship between Guru and Sishya—spiritual preceptor and the disciple—is a mysterious and unique one. The disciple should free his mind of all prejudices and preconceived ideas about his learning and achievements. He should unlearn, as it were, all that he has learnt so far and await the instruction from the Guru. The pot should be emptied before being dipped into the river to take water. Even so, the disciple should empty his mind before sitting at the lotus-feet of the Guru to receive the initiation.

h) “*Sruti-siro-vakyam samakarnyatam*—Let him hear with full faith and devotion the Mahavakyas which are the quintessence of the Vedas.”

To the qualified disciple who has thus approached him and who has his mind purified through service of his feet for sufficiently long period, the Guru gives the Sannyasa Diksha and initiation into the Mahavakyas—the great sentences or dicta of the Upanishads—which through their implied meaning establish the Atman-Brahman identity. There are several Maha Vakyas in the Upanishads of which four are considered to be the prominent ones. They are: *Prajnanam Brahma* in the *Aitareya Upanishad* of the *Rig-Veda*, *Aham Brahmasmi* in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* of the *Yajur-Veda*, *Tat Tvam Asi* in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* of the *Sama Veda* and *Ayam Atma Brahma* in the *Mandukya Upanishad* of the *Atharva Veda*. The Sadhaka is now a Vividisha Sannyasin—a monk engaging himself whole time in deep reflection and profound meditation. Being possessed of the Sadhana-Chatushtaya and having undergone the preliminary practices detailed above, he is able to leave off the literal meaning of these Maha Vakyas and grasp their implied meaning through the Jahad-ajahat Lakshana. This is called Sravana (hearing). Mere hearing of the Vedic dicta will have no effect on one who is not properly qualified and duly initiated. Sravana is hearing, from his own Guru, of the Mahavakya by a qualified aspirant with understanding of its import.

III

वाक्यार्थश्च विचर्यतां श्रुतिशिरः पक्षः समाश्रीयतां
दुस्तर्कात्सुविरम्यतां श्रुतिमतस्तर्कोऽनुसन्धीयताम् ।
ब्रह्मैवास्मि विभाव्यतामहरहर्गर्वः परित्यज्यतां
देहेऽहम्मतिरुज्झ्यतांबुधजनैर्वदः परित्यज्यताम् ॥

vākyārthaśca vicaryatām śrutiśiraḥ pakṣaḥ samāśrīyatām
dustarkātsuviramyatām śrutimatastarko.anusandhīyatām |
brahmaivāsmi vibhāvyaatāmaharahargarvaḥ parityajyatām
dehe.ahammatirujjhyatāmbudhajanairvadaḥ parityajyatām ||

This is an exposition on Manana and Nididhyasana to be practised by the Sadhaka till he gets over the idea of ‘I am the body’ and gets fixed in Brahmakara Vritti—the firm conviction ‘I am Brahman.’

a) “*Vakyarthascha vicharyatam*—Let the implied meaning of the great sentences be reflected upon.”

After Sravana the next stage is Manana i.e., pondering on the import of the Mahavakyas. The Sadhaka should reflect over the meaning of the dictum he has heard from the Guru. During this process of ratiocination, several doubts may arise in his mind, because he has only intellectually grasped the meaning. The knowledge obtained is only indirect and not direct. Till direct knowledge of the Atman-Brahman-identity which is the import of the Maha Vakyas, dawns on him, he will be

haunted by various doubts. The scriptures and the Guru's further personal instructions should be strictly adhered to in the process of ratiocination. Arguments in favour of the implied meaning of the dicta alone should be resorted to. The disciple should not enter into vain arguments or into those which are not traditionally accepted by the wise and the scriptures.

b) "*Sruti-sirah-pakshah samasriyatam*—Let him resort to the Upanishads completely."

Hereafter, the Sannyasin should resort to the Upanishads alone. All his thoughts should be centred round them. From the time of rising from the bed till he goes to bed again at night, his mind should be engaged in reflection. This would certainly dispel all his doubts. He should not depend now on those texts in the Vedas dealing with Karma and Upasana which have to be treated as subordinate or subservient to the Mahavakyas.

All those portions of the Sruti have served their purpose as far as this aspirant is concerned and have therefore to be set aside.

c) "*Dustarkat-suviramyatam*—Let him completely desist from all unnecessary argumentation."

Mere dialectic disputation and scholastic discussions should be avoided by the aspirant. He should also refrain from entering into discussions with those belonging to other philosophical schools, for they involve the risk of his faith being shaken violently.

d) "*Srutimatastarko'nusandhiyatam*—Let him always engage in the investigation and enquiry on the lines of the arguments of the Sruti."

The Sruti is interested only in the Atman-Brahman-identity which fact is established through the Shat-Tatparya Lingas—the six tests for ascertaining the meaning of scriptural texts. They are the Upakarma-Upasamhara (introduction and conclusion), Abhyasa (repetition of the topic at intervals), Apurvata (originality in the teaching), Phala (result achieved from it), Arthavada (eulogy) and Upapatti (demonstration through reasoning). It is an accepted principle that the intended meaning of a scriptural text should satisfy one or more of these six tests. Here, in the case of the Mahavakyas, they satisfy all the six tests as may be seen from the sixth chapter of the Chhandogya Upanishad.

e) "*Brahmaivasmi vibhavyatam aharahah*—Let him always entertain the Bhavana—the inner feeling—'I am Brahman'."

Having cleared all doubts and come to the unshakable conclusion on the implied meaning of the Upanishadic propositions, the Sannyasin is instructed to keep the consciousness 'I am Brahman' uninterruptedly like the continuous flow of oil from one vessel to another. The 'I' gradually drops off. It merges in Brahman. This is called Badha-Samanadhikarana in the Vedantic parlance. The aspirant has through the process of Anvaya and Vyatireka (synthesis and analysis) discriminated the Atman and not-Atman in the earlier stages of his Sadhana and has through the Neti Neti (not this, not this) doctrine (given in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad) eliminated everything in the Samashti (the universal or macrocosm including its final constituents of the five

subtle elements beginning from earth and ending with ether) and everything in the Vyashti (the individual or microcosm beginning from the gross body up to the intellect and also the ego, with the organs, Pranas and the mind in between). After this elimination he is face to face with the Unmanifested (Isvara) in the macrocosm which is the Prajna (the individual in the causal or deep sleep state) in the microcosm. Really there is no distinction between the microcosm and macrocosm because the latter is inclusive of the former. Without allowing him to slip into a state of Sunyata—complete non-existence of Nihilists—the Mahavakyas save him and take him to the final state of Brahmic consciousness.

f) “*Garvah parityajyatam*—Let the Sannyasin renounce the feeling of pride and arrogance.”

Let him not have the feeling of superiority complex, for it is sure to drag him down from the spiritual heights to which he has risen through Brahma-Bhavana. The thought ‘I am spiritually advanced, others are still worldly’ should never rise in him. Because such thoughts are contrary to facts from the view point of the absolute to which he is moving. In the final state described by the Mantra ‘Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma—everything here is verily Brahman, the pure undivided Consciousness’, where is the justification for the feelings of ‘I’, ‘you’ or ‘he’! In the absence of these how can there be pride and haughtiness! To reach this highest state the Acharya asks the Sadhaka to practise consciously absence of pride.

g) “*Dehe-ahammatir-ujjhyatarn*—Let the feeling ‘I am the body’ be given up.”

The root cause of sufferings is the feeling ‘I am this body’. This idea is so deep-rooted as a result of the mutual superimposition of the characteristics of the body on the Atman and those of the Atman on the body. All spiritual practices are aimed at the removal of this false superimposition. But this cannot be done so easily as it is the effect of beginningless Ajnana and it will die only when the Ajnana is destroyed. Ajnana is destroyed only through *Samyag-Jnana*—the knowledge of Aham Brahmasmi. When this knowledge takes firm root in the Sadhaka, the Ajnana in the form of ‘I am the body’ will disappear.

h) *Budha-janair-vadah parityajyatam*—Let him completely give up arguments with the learned.”

When the Sadhaka thus progresses in the spiritual path, he realises the real cause of human suffering in this world. He himself, as a result of his Sadhana, begins to have glimpses of the Reality which give him the Supreme Peace. He now wants to share this with others and with this good intention he starts preaching Yoga and Vedanta. In the course of this work done with the best of intentions he may, without himself knowing it, entangle himself in fruitless arguments with the learned and the wise. Reality Absolute is beyond Sat, Asat and Sadasat—existence, non-existence and existence-cum-non-existence. It is neither non-dual, nor dual, nor a combination of both. At the same time, being immanent, It includes all these and yet remains transcending all. It is beyond all words and thoughts. Hence, when one tries to explain It to others he has necessarily to come down from the level of Absolute Reality to the realm of relative reality or the not-Atman. In this realm of not-Atman there can be no end to arguments, for all arguments depend on the ever-changing intellect. Therefore, the Sadhaka, even though he has reached a high stage in spiritual evolution, is warned not to enter into arguments with the learned.

IV

क्षुद्व्याधिश्च चिकित्स्यतां प्रतिदिनं भिक्षौषधं भुज्यतां
 स्वाद्वन्नं न तु याच्यतां विधिवशात्प्राप्तेन सन्तुष्यताम् ।
 शीतोष्णादि विषह्यतां न तु वृथा वाक्यं समुच्चार्यता-
 मौदासीन्यमभीप्स्यतां जनकृपानैष्ठुर्यमुत्सृज्यताम् ॥

kṣudvvyādhiśca cikitsyatām pratidinam bhikṣauśadham bhujyatām
 svādvannaṃ na tu yācyatām vidhivaśātprāptena santuṣyatām |
 śītoṣṇādi viṣahyatām na tu vṛthā vākyaṃ samuccāryatā-
 maudāsīnyamabhīpsyatām janakṛpānaiṣṭhuryamutsṛjyatām ||

The instructions in this verse are directed towards the Sadhaka who is now in an advanced stage, as to how he should lead the rest of his life in the present body.

a) “*Kshud-vyadhischa chikitsyatam*—Let the disease of hunger be treated.”

As the Sadhaka ascends to the higher rungs of the ladder of spiritual practice, the chances of his downfall are greater and greater, and hence, this important warning is given by the Acharya. Though during the early stages of his Sadhana, he had practised control of all the senses and the mind, there may arise in him the tendency to slowly relax especially in the case of the palate, the sense of taste. The Sannyasin is therefore admonished to consider hunger as a disease. As all diseases of the body and mind are treated with proper medicines, the Sadhaka should treat this disease of hunger also with the medicine of food and drink. It should never be left untreated, because without a healthy body, the Sadhana cannot be completed and the final goal reached. The medicine for the disease of hunger is a nourishing diet. Both overeating and starving are discouraged and the *via media*, the golden mean, is prescribed. Yoga is harmony. Extremes are to be avoided cautiously.

b) “*Pratidinam bhikshaushadam bhujyatam*—Let the monk take the medicine of alms daily.”

Unlike other diseases, the disease of hunger is a daily recurring one and hence treatment also should be given daily. What is the medicine for this disease prescribed by the Acharya for the Sannyasin? It is Bhiksha—food received as alms. No one takes an overdose of medicine, but takes only the minimum, just sufficient to cure the disease. Similarly, the Sannyasin is enjoined to take only the absolute minimum food to keep the body and soul together in a healthy condition, healthy enough to complete the Sadhana in this life itself.

c) “*Svadvannam na tu yachyatam*—Let him not beg for delicious dishes.”

Again, applying the analogy of the treatment of disease, no patient can for obvious reasons demand from the doctor sweet medicines. Even so, the Sannyasin is prohibited from demanding

delicious articles of food from the householder whom he approaches for appeasing his hunger. For, it is considered to be a sinful act because such demand will cause inconvenience to those charitably-minded Grihasthas who give alms to them. The dispassion cultivated with great effort by the Sadhaka will give way to sense-indulgence, if he is not extremely careful in this matter.

d) “*Vidhivasat praptena santushyatam*—Let him be completely satisfied with what he gets as a result of his *Prarabdha Karmas*.”

This instruction clarifies the mental attitude the Sannyasin should have, when he gets food to eat, and when he gets something to drink or some old and torn garment to cover his nakedness. He should have complete satisfaction. He should not entertain a feeling of want or insufficiency, about the quality and quantity of the articles received by him. He should not murmur or curse his fate which has brought him those articles. A feeling of complete satiety must prevail in him. Even during his early Sadhana period he had been cultivating Pratyahara—withdrawal of the mind from sense-objects—with great effort and of his own will, because of the discriminative knowledge that all sense-pleasures are only wombs of pain. He has subsequently renounced the world and taken to the fourth order of Sannyasa and plunged himself into Manana and Nididhyasana on the import of the Mahavakyas into which he has been initiated by his preceptor. Under these conditions, there should be no occasion for any dissatisfaction on account of the presence or absence of any sense-object. None of the objects in the three worlds should be able to disturb his mind either through its presence or absence. There is the risk of a slipping down of the Sadhaka, till the very last stage, viz., the attainment of direct realisation of the Atman-Brahman, because the pull of the senses by and towards their objects coupled with the attraction of the objects by the senses, is too strong for ordinary Sadhakas. Hence it is that the Acharya has introduced this warning even at this advanced stage of the Sadhaka’s march.

e) “*Sitoshnadi vishahyatam*—Let him endure calmly the pairs of opposites like heat and cold.”

Heat and cold, pain and pleasure, merit and sin, love and hate, Daivic and Asuric qualities, good and bad, knowledge and ignorance, etc., are pairs of opposites which are to be transcended by the Sadhaka. He has already renounced what is considered as bad, sinful, Asuric, etc. Now in the advanced stage, the Sadhaka is exhorted to avoid their opposites also like the good, the meritorious, the Daivic, etc., because the Atman, the attainment of which is the final goal of life, is that which transcends all kinds of relations and all pairs of opposites. The Sadhaka should free himself even from what is generally considered as good in this world.

f) “*Na tu vritha vakyam samuccharyatam*—Let him not speak unnecessary words.”

When all the other organs are controlled and prevented from contact with their respective objects, the organ of speech is found, in the case of many a Sadhaka, to take the upper hand and engage itself too much in activity, on the pretext of Loka Sangraha or uplift of humanity. In his over-anxiety to share his knowledge with others, the Sannyasin with the best of intentions, starts preaching to his juniors first and gradually reaches the public at large when he is unknowingly dragged into unnecessary and unpleasant controversies with others. He easily gets himself entangled in them which fact he himself comes to realise only too late. Therefore, the Sadhaka is

instructed to speak only when it is unavoidable. Further, too much of speaking will entail waste of energy which he has conserved with great effort by control of mind, organs, etc., during the early stages of his spiritual practice.

g) *Audasinyam-abhipsyatam*—Let him desire perfect indifference to all worldly affairs."

The Sadhaka who has embraced the order of Sannyasa, who has been initiated into the Mahavakyas and who is engaged whole time in reflection and profound meditation on their import, is advised to keep aloof from all worldly matters to avoid distraction. He is asked to keep an attitude of indifference—not the indifference of the ignorant and selfish people towards the suffering humanity—but the highest indifference of the wise which transcends all pairs of opposites. He is not expected, at this stage of the Sadhana, to mix with worldly-minded people, but if circumstances place him among them, he is advised to play the part of a witness unaffected by whatever happens around him. The Atman is described in the scriptures as the Supreme Witness in the sense that It is free from all actions and relationships and not in the ordinary sense of the term, viz., one who sees with the physical eyes. The Upanishad in trying to explain the nature of the Witness says: "It—the Atman—sees and yet sees not." Being non-dual, homogeneous, without modification, and the eternal Consciousness, It is described by the scriptures in the above enigmatic expression that It sees and yet sees not. The attitude of the Sadhaka should be in harmony with his true nature which is the nature of the Atman.

h) "*Jana-kripa-naishthuryam utsrijyatam*—Let him give up completely both the feelings of kindness and harshness towards others."

Though this advice is included in IV (e), special mention is made of it again, because of its great importance and of the possibility of even the wise being dragged down, without their knowledge, if they are not extremely cautious. It is human nature to entertain feelings of kindness or cruelty or an unsympathetic attitude towards other creatures. While unkindness, cruelty, etc., are universally accepted as undesirable traits and therefore discouraged, kindness is generally considered as a great virtue which all should try to cultivate. The universal brotherhood of man is an offshoot of this virtue. In the case of the advanced Sadhaka, even this may act as a cause of his downfall from the great heights to which he has risen through long and protracted spiritual Sadhana. This is illustrated in the Srimad Bhagavatam in the life of Bharata, a very highly evolved soul, who out of compassion towards a newborn deer which had lost its mother and which was about to be washed away by the current in the river, took it to his Ashram and reared it. This compassion slowly developed into love, then into affection, and thereafter, into great attachment, so much so, the last thought at the time of his death was about the young deer. This brought him the body of a deer in his next birth. Hence, to avoid such downfalls the Sadhaka is advised not to entertain both the feelings of kindness and harshness, but to stick on to an attitude of supreme indifference which transcends all pairs of opposites.

V

एकान्ते सुखमास्यतां परतरे चेतः समाधीयतां
 पूर्णात्मा सुसुमीक्ष्यतां जगदिदं तद्बाधितं दृश्यताम् ।
 प्राक्कर्म प्रविलाप्यतां चित्बलान्नाप्युत्तरैः श्लिष्यतां
 प्रारब्धं त्विह भुज्यतामथ परब्रह्मात्मना स्थीयताम् ॥

ekānte sukhamāsyatām paratare cetah samādhiyatām
 pūrṇātmā susumīkṣyatām jagadidaṃ tadbādhitaṃ dṛśyatām |
 prākkarma pravilāpyatām citibalānnāpyuttaraiḥ śliṣyatām
 prārabdham tviha bhujyatāmatha parabrahmātmanā sthīyatām ||

This fifth verse is more or less a description of a Liberated Sage—a Jivanmukta who passes on to the state of Videhamukti finally.

a) “*Ekante sukham-asyatam*—Let him rest comfortably in seclusion.”

The monk aiming at the one, non-dual Atman-Brahman is to avoid all company and remain alone. That stage in which he was asked to resort to the company of the wise, is now transcended and in the present stage, the Sannyasin who is now a sage is counselled to keep aloof and remain in complete seclusion, so that he can keep his mind fixed on the import of the Mahavakyas. Seclusion usually means absence of another person nearby. Life in caves and forest Asrams is generally considered as secluded life. There is however a higher meaning which is applicable to the sage in meditation. To him seclusion is to keep his consciousness free of all duality. In other words, when his consciousness is fixed in the one, non-dual Atman, he is said to be in seclusion. This has to be practised by the seeker, and physical seclusion will, to some extent, be helpful to attain this higher seclusion.

b) “*Paratare chetah samadhiyatam*—Let his mind completely merge in the Supreme Atman in Samadhi.”

When the instruction in the just preceding section (V-a) is practised uninterruptedly for a long period, i.e., when the mind remains fixed in the consciousness of the Atman sufficiently long, the state of Samadhi or merging of the mind in the Atmic consciousness results. The Triputi, i.e., the triad of meditator, meditation and the object of meditation—all the three merge into the one Atmic consciousness. The subject-object difference no longer exists. The object becomes one with the Subject. The ‘Subject’ alone remains and therefore It loses its subjectivity also. The Sadhaka is no more a Sadhaka. He is a Siddha—a Jivanmukta or a liberated sage.

c) “*Purnatma susamikshyatam*—Let him now experience in full the Infinite Atman.”

The sage has now the direct experience of the Atman which is Purna i.e. Infinite. When it is said that the Jivanmukta sage experiences the Infinite Atman, it means that he himself has become

the Atman, for the Infinite alone can experience the Infinite. As long as one is finite, one can never experience the Infinite. The Upanishads declare that the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman Itself. This is further explained in the statement: ‘remaining as Brahman he attains Brahman’, which shows that there is no ‘becoming’ but only ‘Being’. He realises that all along he had been the Atman itself and that all bondage and miseries were only mere appearances due to false Ajnana (ignorance).

d) “*Jagadidam tad-badhitam drsyatam*—Let him witness the disappearance of this universe in the Atman-Brahman.”

With the direct realisation of the import of the Maha Vakyas which is Atman-Brahman identity, the sage finds himself remaining as the one, non-dual, unmoded Consciousness, the whole phenomenon merging, as it were, in the Noumenon. To him, there is nothing other than Brahman—the Self of this universe. The universe, distinct from Brahman, is naught. In the Mahavakya *Tat Tvam Asi*, that which is represented by the term ‘Tvam’, viz., the Atman, has become one with that which is signified by the term ‘Tat’, viz., Brahman. There is no ‘Tvam’ different from ‘Tat’ and no ‘Tat’ separate from ‘Tvam’. All differences have merged into the non-dual Reality. Similar is the case with the other Mahavakya *Aham Brahmasmi*. The ‘Aham’ becomes one with ‘Brahman’. In *Prajnanam Brahma*, ‘Prajnanam’ dissolves in ‘Brahman’. In *Ayam Atma Brahma*, ‘Ayam-Atma’ becomes one with ‘Brahman’. Thus the sage of realisation experiences the highest absolute Reality—the non-dual Atman-Brahman-Consciousness.

e) “*Prakkarma pravilapyatam*—Let him destroy the Sanchita Karmas.”

When the sage has merged himself in the birthless, deathless, eternal, non-dual Atman, all his Sanchita Karmas, i.e., those Karmas accumulated in hundreds of crores of past lives, are burnt to ashes. Like roasted seeds which have lost the capacity of germination, the past Samskaras and Vasanas of this sage which are burnt in the fire of Samyag-Jnana—Brahman-Knowledge can no more create any new body for him.

f) “*Chitibalannapyuttaraih slishyatam*—With the strength of the Consciousness of the Atman let him stop further accumulation of Agami Karmas.”

A Jivanmukta (liberated sage) does not have the ego as it has merged in the Atman. He is unattached and homogeneous like the vast sky. Hence, there is no feeling of doership and enjoyership in him. In the absence of these two feelings, the fruits of the Karmas done by his body hereafter cannot attach themselves to him and become the cause of either merits or demerits. A Jivanmukta, the scriptures state, is absolutely free and is not bound even by scriptural injunctions. He moves about freely in all the worlds. He neither accepts anything nor rejects anything, His mind is now one with the Atman. He does not entertain any desire for objects nor does he hate them. He is neither afraid of anyone nor is anyone afraid of him. Through this Supreme Brahman-Knowledge all his present Karmas are dried up and they do not therefore cause further rebirth even as a fried seed does not germinate.

g) “*Prarabdham tviha bhujyatam*—Let him exhaust his *Prarabdha* Karmas through actual experience of their results here.”

When the *Sanchita* and *Agami* Karmas are destroyed, what remain are his *Prarabdha* Karmas—those Karmas which have brought about the present body to the sage. This body will continue as long as the fruits of those Karmas remain and it falls when they are completely spent up through experience. Therefore, the Jivanmukta is said to experience the *Prarabdha* Karmas. But, this is an answer to the question of the ignorant who see the body of the Jivanmukta also moving and acting like others. They ask: “If the effects of ignorance are destroyed with their root by *samyag-Jnana* (Brahman-Knowledge), then how does the body live?” It is to convince such ignorant people who entertain doubt of this kind, that the scriptures posit *Prarabdha* in the Self-realised sage,—says the Acharya in his book, ‘Vivekachudamani’. The fact is that with the dawn of Brahman-Knowledge and the direct realisation of the Atman-Brahman, all the three kinds of Karmas, viz., *Sanchita*, *Agami* and *Prarabdha* are completely annihilated. There is only the non-dual Brahman—the pure, infinite Awareness without beginning or end, immediate and transcendent. There is absolutely no duality whatsoever in It.

h) “*Atha parabrahmatmana sthiyatam*—Thereafter, let him firmly rest in the Supreme Transcendental Brahman-Atman.”

The sage finally rests in his own Satchidananda Svarupa—in the non-dual Brahman itself. He is now a Videhamukta—a liberated one without a body. Though in others’ view, he appears to possess a body, to him there is no body, no world, nothing except Brahman. If he sees the world, he sees it as Brahman, and not as anything different from It. The state of a Jivanmukta itself defies description. Then what to say about the state of a Videhamukta! He is the infinite Brahman itself. As Brahman is beyond speech and thought, his state is also indescribable by human language, unthinkable by the human mind and ununderstandable by the human intellect, in the usual sense of these terms. But It is known and understood through ‘direct experience’, It being nearer than one’s own body. We are actually experiencing It every day, nay every moment, but we are not conscious of It because of ignorance and of the resultant innumerable desires in the mind. We are IT alone. IT alone is.

यः श्लोकपञ्चकमिदं पठते मनुष्यः

सञ्चिन्तयत्यनुदिनं स्थिरतामुपेत्य ।

तस्याशु संसृतिदवानलतीव्रघोर-

तापः प्रशान्तिमुपयाति चित्तिप्रसादात् ॥

yaḥ ślokapañcakamidaṃ paṭhate manuṣyaḥ
sañcintayatyanudinam sthiratāmupetya |
tasyāśu saṃsṛtidavānalatīvraghora-
tāpaḥ praśāntimupayāti citiprasādāt ॥

The closing verse describes, in the traditional manner, the *Phala* or the fruit that accrues to one who studies these verses. It says that he who studies these five verses and reflects over their imports daily in his mind which is purified and made steady, freeing it from all kinds of distractions,

and who practises the Sadhana as laid down in these verses, will be speedily saved from the burning heat of the great blazing forest fire of this cycle of transmigration, through the grace of the Atman.

Thus, starting from the study of scriptures, which is the first rung in the spiritual ladder, the Sadhaka is instructed to ascend gradually step by step till he finds himself firmly fixed in the Supreme Brahman. Instead of ascending from the lower to the immediate next higher rung of a ladder, if a man leaves off one or more steps and tries to jump to the higher rungs, he would naturally fall and break his legs. Even so, attempt to short-circuit the prescribed process is the cause of failure of many an aspirant in the spiritual path. Performance of one's duties without desire for fruits, worship of God through them, renunciation of desires, expiation of sins, reflection over the defects in sense-pleasures, a firm resolve to attain Liberation and leaving one's own home, are the next seven steps in the first stage. In the next stage, company of the wise, surrender to God, cultivation of Shatsampat, complete renunciation of Karmas, approaching the preceptor, service at his feet, prayer for initiation and getting initiated into the Mahavakyas are prescribed for the Sadhaka. Then comes the third stage, where he is instructed to reflect over the import of the Mahavakyas, to completely depend on the Upanishads, to avoid all arguments against the spirit of the scriptures, to follow the line of arguments prescribed in them, to maintain continuously the thought 'I am Brahman', to renounce pride and the idea of 'I am the body', and to avoid all unnecessary argumentation and dialectical discussions with the learned and the wise. The fourth verse, in describing the next stage, exhorts the monk to consider hunger as a disease, to treat it with the medicine of food received through begging, 'to renounce desire for delicious dishes, to remain satisfied with what he gets through his Prarabdha Karmas, to lead his life enduring the pairs of opposites like heat and cold, to avoid all unnecessary talks, to maintain an indifferent attitude to worldly matters and to avoid hatred as well as feeling of compassion towards others. The last and the fifth stage is where the Sadhaka resorts to complete seclusion and fixes his mind in Samadhi on the Supreme Atman. He now directly experiences the Infinite Atman-Brahman and does not see the world different from It. He is freed from all the three kinds of Karmas and finally rests in the Atman-Brahman, the one stupendous, supreme, non-dual Reality. All questions about the 'I'; 'world' and 'God' dissolve once for all.